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### Committee on Aging

February 5, 2013

### Testimony of Joelen J. Gates

#### H. B. 5760 – An Act Increasing the Personal Needs Allowance Recommended Action: Support

Good afternoon, my name is Joelen Gates. I am an attorney with Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. in Willimantic where I represent elderly people, including nursing home residents, with legal problems involving medical care. I am submitting this testimony in support of H.B. 5760 on behalf of the Legal Services programs in Connecticut and the low-income individuals we serve.

This bill would raise the personal needs allowance (PNA) for nursing home residents on Medicaid (Title XIX) to \$72.75 per month. The personal needs allowance is the amount of money nursing home residents on Medicaid are allowed to keep from their monthly income to pay for expenses not covered by Medicaid, such as clothes, haircuts, postage, telephone, cable TV, internet, toiletries, personal snacks, etc. The balance of the resident's monthly income must be paid directly to the nursing home towards the cost of care.

In 2011, the legislature reduced the PNA for nursing home residents from \$69.00 to \$60.00 as part of the effort to "share the pain" in balancing the budget. This bill would simply restore the PNA to \$69.00 with the COLA of \$3.75 which is what it would have been had the PNA not been reduced. In other words, nursing home residents would be in the same position financially, as they were in 2011.

Nursing home residents are in a special situation, having lost much of their freedom to travel, communicate with relatives and friends, and buy things they enjoy. For many, a telephone is the only means they have to talk to loved ones. As we all know, the cost of basic services keeps going up. Sixty dollars is not enough to pay for these personal items. Balancing the budget on the backs of nursing home residents is not the way to balance the state budget.

We therefore urge you to support the increase in the personal needs allowance for nursing home residents to enable them live with dignity and pay for basic needs.

